



# UPDATE

January/February 2015

A bi-monthly newsletter for Veterans served by the St. Cloud VA Health Care System, and for those who serve Veterans. Send news items and comments to St. Cloud VA Health Care System, Attn: Public Affairs Officer, 4801 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud, MN 56303, or via email to [Barry.Venable@va.gov](mailto:Barry.Venable@va.gov)



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HONORING SERVICE  
EMPOWERING  
HEALTH

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## Calendar of Events

Thursday, January 1—**Outpatient Clinics Closed for Federal Holiday.** St. Cloud VA Health Care System outpatient clinics and administrative offices, including Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Brainerd, Montevideo and Alexandria will be closed on Thursday, January 1, in observance of New Year's Day, a federal holiday. The Urgent Care Clinic at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center will be open. Hours of operation for the Urgent Care Clinic are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week, including federal holidays. The Community Living Center and residential treatment programs will be open.

Monday, January 5 & February 2 (8:10 a.m.)—Listen to the **Veterans Affairs Radio Show** on KNSI, AM 1450/FM 103.3.

Tuesday, January 6 & February 3 (Noon-1 p.m.)—**VA Caregiver Support Group** at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center, Building 48, Room 204, and Brainerd CBOC via Vtel. Support group for Family Caregivers of Veterans from all eras of service. Contact Jess Behrends at (320) 252-1670, ext. 7283, for more information.

Tuesday, January 6 & January 20, February 3 & February 17 (Noon-2 p.m.)—**Veterans Law Clinic** at the St. Cloud VA in Building 28, Room 126. Free legal consultation for Veterans for Social Security Law, Housing, Consumer, Child Support, Family Law, and Employment. No criminal law issues will be discussed. Please call 320-253-0138 or 1-800-622-7773 to schedule an appointment.

Wednesday, January 7 (8 a.m.-1 p.m.)—**Crow Wing Energized 2015 Health & Wellness Summit** at Arrowwood Lodge, 6967 Lake Forest Road, Baxter, MN. Brainerd CBOC and Crow Wing County Veterans Service Officer will be on site to answer questions about health care, eligibility and community wellness topics.

Tuesday, January 13 (Noon-1:30 p.m.)—**VHA Caregiver Program: PTSD and Family Relationships.** In partnership with VA's Virtual eHealth University (vVeHU) this is LIVE Virtual Training designed specifically for Caregivers of Veterans. This session is designed to equip Caregivers of Veterans with tools to recognize and respond effectively to stress in children and other family members affected by a Veteran with symptoms of PTSD. To register, visit [www.myvehucampus.com](http://www.myvehucampus.com) and select "Upcoming Events" icon in the virtual lobby.

Friday, January 16 & February 20 (Noon-2:00 p.m.)—**Southwestern Minnesota Veterans Law Clinic** at the Montevideo CBOC. Free legal consultation for Veterans for Social Security Law, Housing, Consumer, Child Support, Family Law, and Employment. No criminal issues will be discussed. Please call (320) 403-1051 to schedule an appointment.

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## Calendar of Events

Monday, January 19—**Outpatient Clinics Closed for Federal Holiday.** St. Cloud VA Health Care System outpatient clinics and administrative offices, including Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Brainerd, Montevideo and Alexandria will be closed on Monday, January 19, in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, a federal holiday. The Urgent Care Clinic at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center will be open. Hours of operation for the Urgent Care Clinic are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week, including federal holidays. The Community Living Center and residential treatment programs will be open.

Wednesday, January 21 & February 18 (8:10 a.m.)—Listen to **Voices for Veterans Radio Show** on WJON AM 1240.

Wednesday, January 21 (1:30 p.m.)—**Quarterly memorial service** at the St. Cloud VA Chapel for all Veterans who have recently passed away.

Saturday, January 24 (9 a.m.-5 p.m.), & Sunday, January 25 (9 a.m.-3 p.m.)—**St. Cloud Gun Show** at the National Guard Armory, 1710 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud, MN. Representatives from the St. Cloud VA will be on site to answer questions about health care services and eligibility.

Saturday, January 31 (9:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.)—**Foley Business Expo** at Foley High School Gym, 840 Norman Avenue North, Foley, MN. Representatives from the St. Cloud VA will be on site to answer questions about health care services and eligibility.

Friday, February 6 (Noon-9 p.m.); Saturday, February 7 (10 a.m.-8 p.m.); & Sunday, February 8 (10 a.m.-5 p.m.)—**St. Cloud Sportsmen's Show** at River's Edge Convention Center, 10 Fourth Avenue South, St. Cloud, MN. Representatives from the St. Cloud VA will be on site to answer questions about health care services and eligibility.

Monday, February 16—**Outpatient Clinics Closed for Federal Holiday.** St. Cloud VA Health Care System outpatient clinics and administrative offices, including Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Brainerd, Montevideo and Alexandria will be closed on Monday, February 16, in observance of Presidents' Day, a federal holiday. The Urgent Care Clinic at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center will be open. Hours of operation for the Urgent Care Clinic are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week, including federal holidays. The Community Living Center and residential treatment programs will be open.

Tuesday, February 24; Wednesday, February 25; & Thursday, February 26 (9 a.m.-4 p.m.)—**Central Minnesota Farm Show** at River's Edge Convention Center, 10 Fourth Avenue South, St. Cloud, MN. Representatives from the St. Cloud VA will be on site to answer questions about health care services and eligibility.

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## VA Expands Eligibility for VA Health Care Related to Military Sexual Trauma

*Expansion closes a gap in health care eligibility*



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), under authority from the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (“VACAA”), announced expanded eligibility for Veterans in need of mental health care due to sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurred during their military service. This trauma is commonly known as military sexual trauma (MST).\*

This expansion, which primarily pertains to Reservists and National Guard members participating in weekend drill, gives the authority to offer Veterans the appropriate care and services needed to treat conditions resulting from MST that occurred during a period of inactive duty training.

“VA simply must be an organization that provides comprehensive care for all Veterans dealing with the effects of military sexual trauma,” said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. “Our range of services for MST-related experiences are constantly being reexamined to best meet the needs of our Veterans.”

Secretary McDonald recently met with Ruth Moore, a Navy Veteran and MST survivor for whom the Ruth Moore Act of 2013 is named. Ms. Moore will be working with VA to ensure that survivors are treated fairly and compassionately, and that Veterans with MST can access fair compensation exams and access health care practitioners who are trained in understanding and working with MST issues.

VA works closely with trauma survivors to ensure a full continuum of health care services are provided to assist Veterans recovering from experiences of MST. Recognizing that MST survivors may have special needs and concerns, every VA health care facility has an MST Coordinator who serves as a contact person for MST-related issues. Every VA medical center and Community-based Vet Center offers MST-related outpatient counseling.

Currently, all VA health care for mental and physical health conditions related to MST is provided free of charge. Veterans do not need to have a service-connected disability or seeking disability compensation to be eligible for MST-related counseling and care. Veterans also do not need to have reported such incidents to the Department of Defense or possess

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documentation or records to support their assertion of having experienced such trauma. The determination of whether a Veteran's condition is MST-related is strictly a clinical determination made by the responsible VA mental health provider. Finally, Veterans need not be enrolled in VA's health care system to qualify for MST-related treatment, as it is independent of VA's general treatment authority.

In addition to treatment programs, VA also provides training to staff on issues related to MST, including a mandatory training on MST for all mental health and primary care providers. VA also engages in a range of outreach activities to Veterans and conducts monitoring of MST-related screening and treatment, in order to ensure that adequate services are available. Veterans can learn more about VA's MST-related services online at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp).

***\*What is military sexual trauma (MST)?***

*Military sexual trauma, or MST, is the term used by VA to refer to experiences of sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that a Veteran experienced during his or her military service. The definition used by the VA comes from Federal law (Title 38 U.S. Code 1720D) and is "psychological trauma, which in the judgment of a VA mental health professional, resulted from a physical assault of a sexual nature, battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment which occurred while the Veteran was serving on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training." Sexual harassment is further defined as "repeated, unsolicited verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature which is threatening in character."*

*More concretely, MST includes any sexual activity where a Servicemember is involved against his or her will -- he or she may have been pressured into sexual activities (for example, with threats of negative consequences for refusing to be sexually cooperative or with implied better treatment in exchange for sex), may have been unable to consent to sexual activities (for example, when intoxicated), or may have been physically forced into sexual activities. Other experiences that fall into the category of MST include unwanted sexual touching or grabbing; threatening, offensive remarks about a person's body or sexual activities; and threatening and unwelcome sexual advances. The identity or characteristics of the perpetrator, whether the Servicemember was on or off duty at the time, and whether he or she was on or off base at the time do not matter. If these experiences occurred while an individual was on active duty or active duty for training, they are considered by VA to be MST.*



**Want to talk to someone?**  
**The St. Cloud VA Military Sexual Trauma  
Program Coordinator is:**  
***Joy Finkelson***  
Located in Bldg. 28 Room 7  
Phone: (320) 252-1670 ext. 6398



## Online VA Prescription Tracking

Available on My HealtheVet  
[www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)



My Health, My Care: 24/7 Online Access to VA



### Easy as One, Two, Three!

- 1 Go to **My HealtheVet** at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov), then to the home page to log in\*
- 2 Go to the **Pharmacy** tab
- 3 Select the **Refill My Prescriptions** or **Prescription Refill History**. Once there, you can access the red **"Track Delivery"** button

\* To refill your VA prescription, you must have an *Advanced* or *Premium* My HealtheVet account. Simply go to the *"Register Today"* button on the My HealtheVet home page at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov) to get started.

## With Track Delivery on My HealtheVet you can:

- Track Delivery of a VA prescription which was mailed in the last 45 days, anytime and anywhere you have access to the Internet
- Know when your prescription package should arrive to your home or address of record
- View details about tracking information on each prescription
- Know if other items are included in the same delivery package

### Need Help or Have Questions?

Help with Track Delivery is available through the My HealtheVet Help Desk.

Contact the Help Desk online by selecting the **Contact MHV** tab in My HealtheVet.

Call the Help Desk directly at **1-877-327-0022** or **1-800-877-8339** (TTY), Monday – Friday, 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. (Central Time).

For questions about your medication, contact your primary care provider or local VA pharmacist. The telephone number is printed on your prescription label.

The Track Delivery feature is not available for medications that are dispensed and mailed from your local VA pharmacy. Use your routine methods of tracking for these medications.

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration

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## Veterans Town Hall Meeting

The second St. Cloud VA Veterans Town Hall Meeting was held on December 10, at 5 p.m., at American Legion Post #260 in Monticello.



Veteran Ted Farnam addressed the St. Cloud VA staff members with a concern at the Veterans town hall meeting held on December 10 at the Monticello American Legion.

Jointly hosted by the American Legion, Wright County Veterans Service Office and the St. Cloud VA Health Care System, the town hall provided an opportunity for St. Cloud VA leadership to meet with and hear from Veterans in Wright County and surrounding areas.

Approximately 30 Veterans were in attendance. Flu shots and benefits and eligibility information were provided from 4 to 5 p.m., followed by a short presentation from St. Cloud VA Director Barry Bahl.

Although Veterans asked a variety of questions and concerns, three themes were clearly evident. The first is that transportation to VA appointments is a real challenge, while the second is the widely held opinion that the VA Dental eligibility should be expanded as dental care is a basic and universal concern to all Veterans. The third theme is that the Veterans in attendance were overall pleased with and supportive of VA services, but would like more convenient locations to receive care.

Other questions concerned whether Veterans had the ability to transfer care between VA facilities, how to obtain optometry referrals, the availability of evening and weekend appointments, availability of chiropractic care, National Guard and Reserve eligibility, and how to get more Veterans to use their VA benefits.

The St. Cloud VA expresses great appreciation to American Legion Post 260 for being wonderful hosts and for making the broasted chicken dinner available to meeting participants, and to the Wright County Veterans Service office for arranging a very meaningful event for all participants.

The next scheduled town hall meeting is March 11, 2015, in the Alexandria area.

All Veterans are encouraged to enroll for VA health care benefits by contacting their County Veterans Service office, or the St. Cloud VA Eligibility Office at 320-255-6340.



Director Barry Bahl and Chief of Staff Dr. Susan Markstrom address a Veteran's concern about health care options at the St. Cloud VA during the Veterans town hall meeting on December 10 at the Monticello American Legion.

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## Wind Turbine Contract Terminated

On October 27, 2014, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Contracting Officer informed the contractor that Contract Number VA776-C-0015, “Wind Turbine Electric Generating System,” was terminated for default. The basis of the termination is the contractor’s failure to provide VA with a fully operational, commissioned wind turbine, in accordance with and as required under the contract.

VA will now pursue due recourse associated with the terminated contract, possibly including removal of the wind turbine, and recovery of costs to VA. In the future, provided the pertinent technology and conditions are still feasible, VA would consider procuring the installation of a new wind turbine at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center.

“Our focus is on providing our Veterans with high quality health care in a timely manner and delivering it with a positive experience,” said St. Cloud VA Health Care System Director Barry I. Bahl.

“Our construction efforts support these mission priorities and are focused on the need to expand to meet the expansive growth in the number of Veterans we serve, and are aligned to adapt our 90-year-old infrastructure to deliver the health care services needed by today’s Veterans,” Bahl said. “The turbine was intended to provide the medical center with clean, reliable and renewable energy. We are disappointed that after three and half years of time and effort, the turbine is not contributing to these efforts, he said.”

In 2007, VA determined through a contracted detailed feasibility study that a wind turbine at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center (VAMC) would be technically and economically feasible. VA awarded a competitively-awarded contract to build the St. Cloud wind turbine in September 2009, using American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding. In April 2011, the wind turbine was presented to VA for commissioning, a process of testing the wind turbine that must be successfully completed as required by the contract prior to VA acceptance. However, the turbine was not able to be successfully commissioned, due to unresolved significant and material performance deficiencies. To date, the turbine has never completed the necessary commissioning process under the contract. It has remained non-operational, due to inadequate contractor performance.

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VA takes the matter very seriously, and is very frustrated and disappointed that the contractor has not complied with the terms and conditions of the contract, and provided VA with a fully functioning turbine. VA did not bargain for a non-operational turbine sited at the St. Cloud VAMC in this condition. The turbine never passed the contractual commissioning requirements, thus VA has not formally accepted it under the contract.

VA's efforts to resolve the underlying issues with the contractor have been unsuccessful, despite lengthy discussions. Accordingly, VA issued a written Show Cause Notice to the contractor, to enable VA to confirm in a response due from the contractor, that they are unable or unwilling to provide VA with a commissioned, fully functioning turbine. In response to the Show Cause Notice, the contractor confirmed it will not provide a fully functional wind turbine to VA, and that it and its surety lack the financial resources to successfully perform under the contract. As a result, VA had no choice but to terminate the contractor for default, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the contract.

### **DID YOU KNOW**

- **Socrates, one of the most famous Greek philosophers, never wrote down a single word of his teachings.**
- **The White House has 34 bathrooms.**
- **By law, Bourbon must be produced in America, made from at least 51 percent corn, and made from a fermented sourmash of grains.**
- **Women were not allowed to vote in France until 1944.**

### **QUOTATION OF THE DAY**

**"My family was so poor they couldn't afford any kids. The lady next door had me."**

**- Lee Trevino**

# Veterans Choice Program

**Veterans now have the option to receive care in the community rather than waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility.**

## You may be eligible to use the Choice Program if:

—Your current residence is **more than 40 miles** from the closest VA health care facility, or

—You have been told by your local VA medical facility that you will need to wait **more than 30 days** from your preferred date or the date medically determined by your physician

As part of the program, enrolled Veterans will receive a **Choice Card** from VA.

*If you are satisfied with the care provided by VA, simply store your card in case you need it for the future.*

The Choice Card does not replace the VA identification card. Please do not throw away that identification card.

All Choice Card care must be preauthorized. If you do not receive approval, you may be responsible for the costs of the non-VA treatment you receive.

## Using the Choice Program

***Veterans who live 40 miles from the nearest VA facility (including CBOCs), and want to get care in the community for any service that is clinically necessary may use the Veterans Choice Card.***

### **Here's how:**

1—Decide which non-VA health care provider you would like to use. Unfortunately, not all providers will be covered so if your preferred provider is not available, other providers in your area may be recommended.

2—Make sure you have information on hand about any other health insurance coverage you may have.

3—Call **866-606-8198** to make sure you qualify, that treatment is clinically necessary, and to schedule an appointment.

For completed appointments, your records will automatically be sent to the VA.

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***Veterans who are scheduled for an appointment that is not within 30 days of the date determined by your provider or from their preferred date may use the Choice Card to make an earlier appointment with a non-VA community provider, only for the service that cannot be scheduled within 30 days.***

**Here's how:**

1—After 72 hours, call **866-606-8198** to VERIFY ELIGIBILITY to use the *Choice Card*. When calling, be prepared to provide information on other health insurance coverage you may have.

2—If an appointment is made using the *Choice Card* the existing appointment with us will automatically be cancelled and records from the *Choice Card* appointment will be sent to us—no other action is needed.

3—If for some reason you do not make an appointment using the Choice Card then your appointment with us is already scheduled and no other action is needed.

**Frequently Asked Questions:**

**How is the 40 mile distance computed?**

We use the address of record in your medical record compared to the nearest VA facility, including CBOCs.

**Why do I have to provide other health insurance information?**

When using the Choice Card VA is the second payer after other health insurance and your private insurance deductibles and co-pays may apply for non service connected care.

**What about Travel Pay?**

The Choice Act does not change Beneficiary Travel Reimbursement benefits. Just like at a VA appointment, travel reimbursement claims for a Choice Program appointment must be submitted within 30 days.

**Can the Choice Card be used for emergency care or Nursing Home care?**

No. The Choice Program does not include unscheduled (emergency) non-VA care or Nursing Home care.

For more information call (866) 606-8198, visit [www.va.gov/opa/choiceact](http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact) or contact the Patient Advocate at (320) 255-6353.

**Locating a Community Provider:** Search the list of approved care providers in your area at: <https://hnfs.com/content/hnfs/home/va/home/veterans-choice.html>

If you are aware of providers that may want to join the network they can call Health Net at 800-979-9620.

## Free Wi-Fi Now Available

Veterans and visitors can now use their electronic device to get on the Internet for free at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center.

The system, called *Veterans Guest Internet Access* (VGIA), is now available in several buildings and 29 other “hot spots” in patients care areas throughout the facility.

Users can sign in using their electronic device at: “**VA-Guest-WiFi**.” There will be a Splash Page where users are required to accept the terms and condition for use of the service.

The Wi-Fi connection will end after 30 minutes of inactive use.

The Wi-Fi will not impact the VA Wireless Network or the medical telemetry systems used in the medical center for IT communications and patient care.

VA medical centers and nursing care facilities around the country are adding Wi-Fi to better serve Veterans and their families. It is the same kind of service you find in hotels, restaurants, and coffee shops in our community.



### Locations

Bldgs. 2, 8, 9, 28-2E  
CLC Units in Bldgs. 48-1, 49, 50 & 51  
Bldg. 57 (Vocational Resources Laboratory)  
Bldg. 88 (Chapel)  
Bldg. 95 (Canteen)  
Bldg. 96 (Recreation Center)  
Bldg. 1 Locations include:  
-Lab and Imaging Waiting Areas  
-Primary Care Waiting Areas  
-Urgent Care Waiting Area  
-Specialty Clinic & ASC Waiting Areas  
Bldg. 3 (Dental Clinic)  
Bldg. 4 (Dining Room)  
Bldg. 5 (Pharmacy)  
Bldg. 28 Waiting Areas  
Bldg. 29, Rm. 20 (Primary Care Classrooms)  
Bldg. 29 (Audiology & Optometry Clinics)  
Bldg. 29 (1<sup>st</sup> Floor Waiting Areas)  
Bldg. 48, Rm. 14 (Classroom) & Rm. 16 (Fitness Center)  
Bldg. 48, Rm. 237 (Patient Advocate Office)  
Bldg. 111 Waiting Area



### **Women Veterans To Gather to Purchase New License Plates**

New Year, New Plates! On January 2, Women Veterans will line up to purchase the newly designed Women Veterans License Plate. The plates bear the inscription “Woman Veteran” and follow criteria established by a working group of Women Veterans and Public Safety employees. These are the first Veterans plates in Minnesota that specifically refer to Women Veterans.

According to the bill’s author, State Senator Alice Johnson, the specialty license plate will go a long way toward removing the invisibility that many of the Minnesota’s 29,000 women Veterans feel.

Women are the fastest growing population within the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs. “Although female Veterans have served in every country America has been engaged in, many times they are not recognized for their contribution to our country,” Senator Johnson said. “This license plate is a small way Minnesota can recognize, thank, and honor our female Veterans.”

A group of women Veterans will gather at the Town Square DMV, in St. Paul at 10 a.m., to purchase the first plates. Any woman wanting a plate should bring their DD214 (Discharge papers) to the DMV and request a Woman Veteran license plate. Motorcycle and Disabled Plates for women Veterans are also available. Estimated costs for application and fees are \$20.





Every day Veterans and their families are discovering ways to lead fulfilling lives, by ...

... reaching out for support

... addressing health concerns for themselves and their loved ones

... finding solutions to important issues and overcoming challenges

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) created [Make the Connection](http://www.MakeTheConnection.net) to inform Veterans, their families and friends, and members of their communities about the resources designed to help Veterans live well.

Service members have been trained to work through difficult situations together and to surmount obstacles that stand in the way of a successful mission. Veterans can use the skills learned while in the Armed Forces to address and overcome personal challenges they may face after leaving the service. And, just like when they were in the military, Veterans don't have to go it alone.

At [MakeTheConnection.net](http://www.MakeTheConnection.net), Veterans and their loved ones will find information, insight, and the support they have earned. In this dynamic, interactive, and confidential environment, visitors can view candid testimonials of Veterans who have dealt with and are working through a variety of common life experiences, day-to-day symptoms, as well as mental health conditions. Visitors hear real stories from others like them who have overcome challenges such as transitioning from service, trouble sleeping, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

VA specializes in the care and treatment of Veterans. In recent years, research from around the world has dramatically increased our understanding of mental health conditions and how to treat them. Many Veterans have gotten treatment for mental health conditions and found solutions for improving their lives. Whether Veterans have recently returned from deployment, were stateside through time in service, or have been home for 40 years, it's never too late for them to get professional support for the issues they are dealing with. Treatment works and recovery is possible.

When Veterans and their families need support, reaching out for assistance is a good first step. [MakeTheConnection.net](http://www.MakeTheConnection.net) makes it easy to take that step and provides information and resources.



Yoga classes have been offered since the first week of November 2014 to the inpatient Residential Rehabilitation and Treatment Program (RRTP) Veterans. The Recreation Therapy Wellness Program started the class as an open class to allow Veterans to sign up on a

week-to-week basis, making it more flexible for them and their schedules. The class can accommodate up to eight Veterans each week.

What is yoga? Yoga is an ancient Indian, non-religious approach that focuses on meditation, mindfulness, breathing, and postures. In the practice of yoga, the practitioner places their body in a series of stationary positions. Each position is designed to create particular body alignments that utilize an important balance of isometric contractions and relaxations. At the same time that there is an essential relaxation component to yoga, there is also an emphasis on controlled positioning and breathing methods to exercise concentration.

Some Veterans thought that yoga would help them for the physical benefits: strength, flexibility, etc. However, when they leave, they have gained so much more. Yoga definitely helps to build strength and flexibility, but this 5,000-year-old practice also reduces stress, alleviates pain, and decreases symptoms of depression and anxiety. It has the ability to increase concentration, encourage relaxation, promote feelings of physical and mental balance, and so much more.

Several Veterans who have participated in the yoga classes through RRTP at the St. Cloud VA have already experienced some of these benefits. Veterans of all ages, varying physical abilities and from all demographics are all seeking something different from the yoga class. Veterans have already reported it reduced some of their pain, has helped them to feel more relaxed and less angry, decreased their stress level and even helped a Veteran bend over and tie their shoes with ease after class.

Veterans have let staff know that if a yoga class was offered to them in the past, they were extremely apprehensive about taking the class considering the setting in which it was held. It made them feel uncomfortable trying something new in front of new people. They have been happy about the opportunity to experience yoga class in a structured treatment program with other Veterans; it has helped them to feel more comfortable.

Studies have shown the proven effectiveness of yoga for specific conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Fibromyalgia, Depression, Anxiety, Chronic Low Back Pain, and more.

The VA is also offering a six-week Women Veterans Yoga Group, and participation is well above expectations. This class is expected to continue beyond the six weeks and may evolve into a permanent class that we can offer.

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## Women Veterans Acrylic Painting Workshop

If you were a recovering alcoholic who changed your life by deciding to become an artist, how would you spend your Tuesday evenings?

If you are Jennifer Hill of St. Cloud, Minnesota, you would spend it leading an acrylic painting workshop for women Veterans at the St. Cloud VA, working to help women Veterans enrich their lives through art.

The recently concluded six-week workshop provided six women Veterans, ranging in ages from their mid-30s to late 50s, an opportunity to learn to paint. Moreover, the workshop provided the women Veterans time to “be together.”

“That’s important,” says Women Veterans Program Manager Julie Roman Vera. “Women Veterans don’t traditionally think of themselves as Veterans, and do not seek each other out.”

“But, there aren’t many other groups who so readily identify with one another as Veterans, and giving these women an opportunity to simply get together is therapeutic on a number of levels,” she added.

The joy of painting in a group setting is that it allows each person to dive into their own painting experience, but to also be able to share immediately, says Hill. “During a typical two-hour session there are long periods when the women would get into a ‘peaceful, meditative zone,’ and then all of a sudden group discussions would occur,” Hill said.

At the beginning of the workshop, each woman started with a blank canvas and selected a photo that was meaningful to her to paint. “We worked through a few exercises and before we knew it they were painting,” Hill said.

It is wonderful to provide an environment with positive feedback and an immediate reward, Hill says. “Painting with acrylics also offers the opportunity to not make any mistakes,” Hill says. “If you make a boo-boo then it’s easy to fix—you simply paint over it.”

Hill became involved with the acrylic workshop because of the close association between the arts and music programs at the College of Benedict in St. Joseph, Minnesota, and the St. Cloud VA’s Music Therapist Beverly “BJ” Gross.

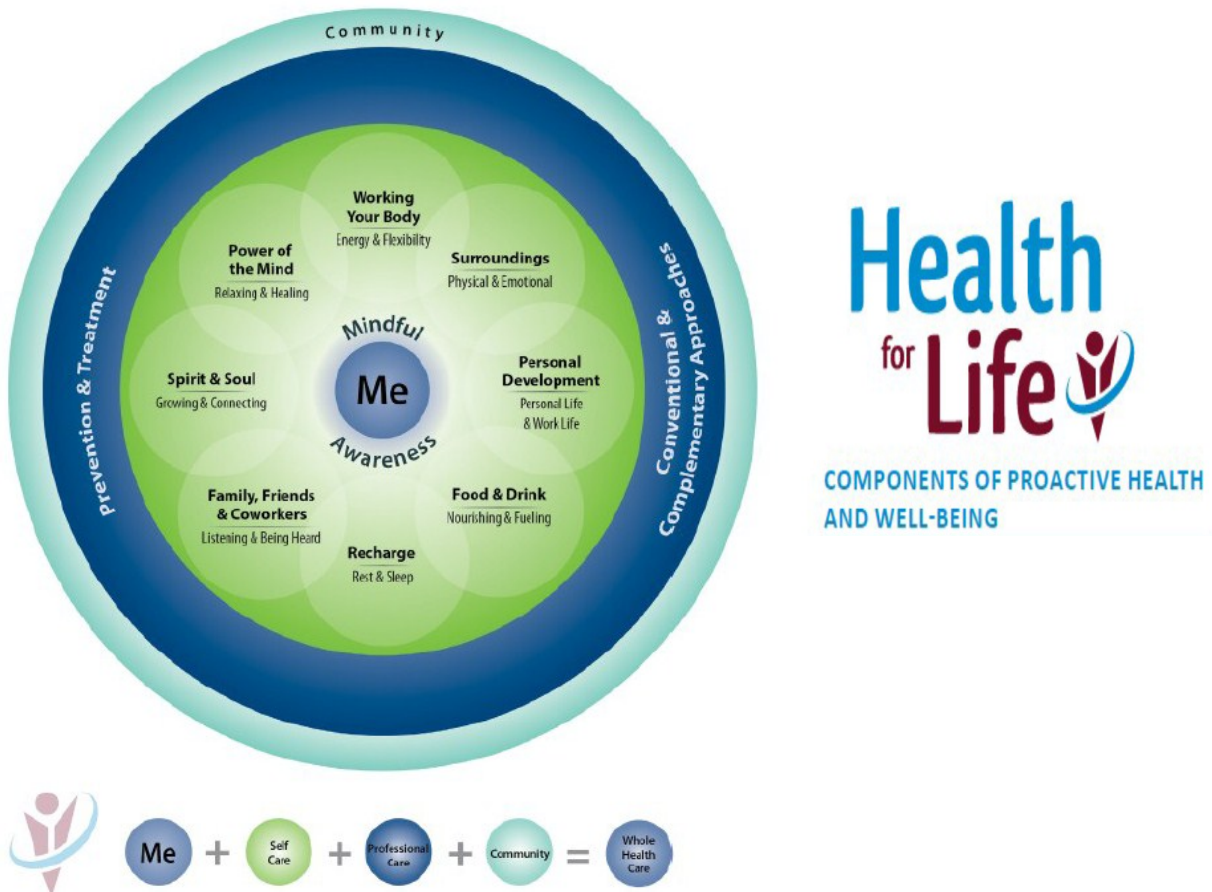
Hill says that while this workshop was her first experience leading a class for women Veterans, it will not be her last. “We think for the next session we may extend it to eight weeks,” she said.



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## Health for Life: 21st Century Health Care the VA Way, Designing and Delivering the Future of Health Care Today

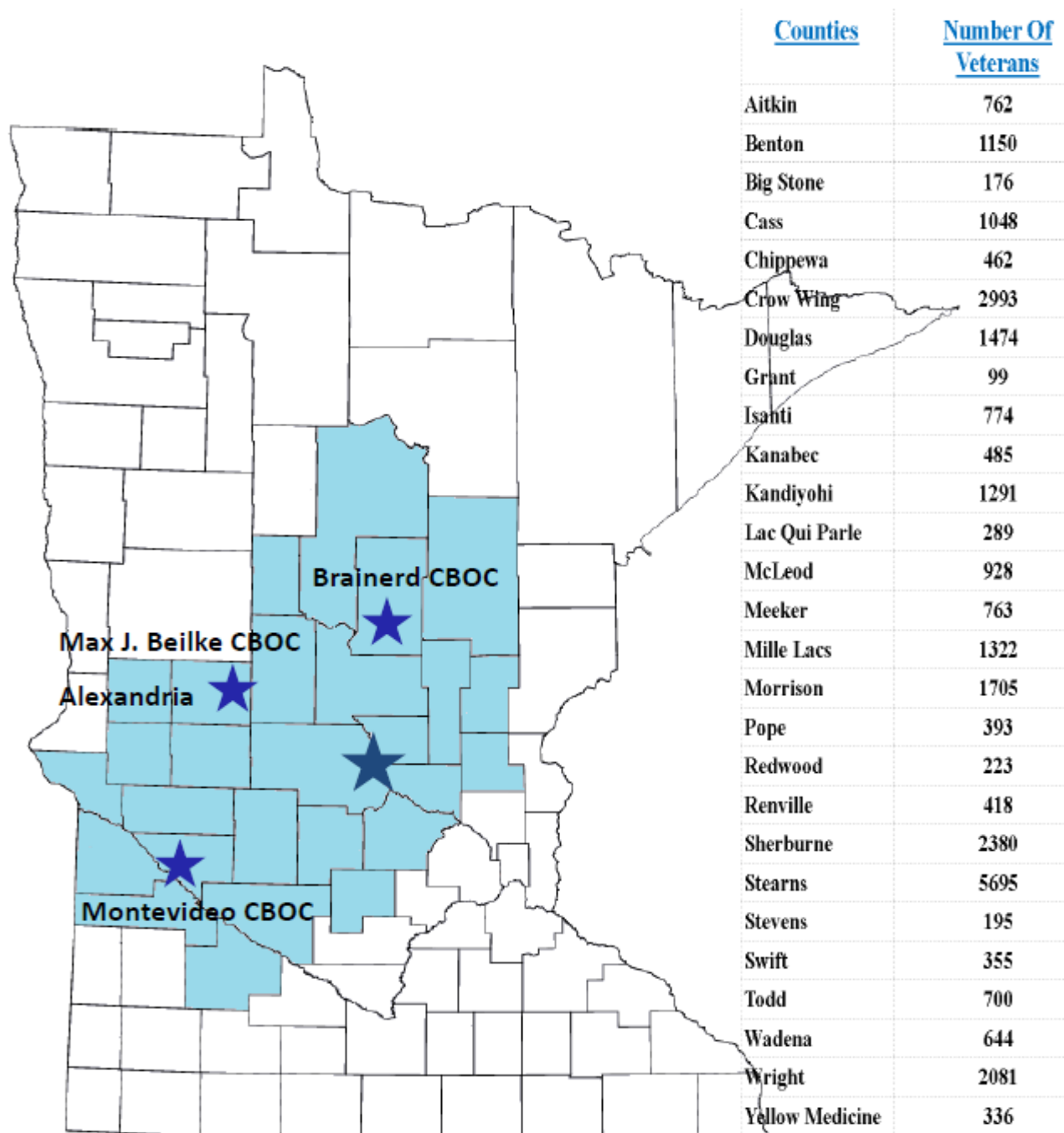
*Explore the Strategy of Patient-Driven Health Care*



This diagram showing the components of proactive health and well-being can help you think about your health as a whole. All of the areas in the circle are important, and connected. Improving one area can benefit the other areas of health and influence your overall physical, emotional, and mental health and well-being. The human body and mind have tremendous capacity to heal, and these innate abilities are strengthened or weakened by many factors that we can influence. The inner circle represents you, your values, and what really matters to you. The next circle is your self-care—the circumstances and choices you make in your day-to-day life. The professional care ring represents care you receive such as examinations, tests, medications, surgery, and counseling and complementary approaches including acupuncture and mind-body therapies. The outer ring represents your community and the people and groups to whom you are connected.

To learn more, visit <http://healthforlife.vacloud.us/>

## Where Veterans Live in the St. Cloud VA Service Area



The St. Cloud VAHCS is assigned a primary service area of 27 Central Minnesota counties. Over 29,000 Veterans from these counties receive care through the St. Cloud VA Health Care System. Over 8,000 Veterans from across Minnesota and the Upper Midwest travel to us to receive specialized care and services.



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# ***A Recipe for Health***

## **Heart Healthy Sloppy Joes**

### ***Ingredients***

1 lb. lean ground beef

1 green pepper, chopped

1 onion, chopped

1½ (10.75-oz. each) cans

reduced-sodium tomato soup

6 whole-wheat hamburger buns

### ***Directions***

In a nonstick frying pan, cook the hamburger, onion and pepper until the meat is browned and the vegetables are tender, approximately 10 minutes. Drain well and return the mixture to the frying pan. Add the tomato soup to the ground beef mixture and stir well. Simmer for at least 10 minutes. Serves 6.

### ***Nutritional Information***

386 calories, 19.3g fat, 18.6g protein, 550mg sodium, 34.2g carbohydrates.



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